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Wednesday, June 25, 2008 **Search**

For immediate release

MARITIME UNIVERSITIES ACCESSIBLE TO REGION'S RURAL RESIDENTS

CHARLOTTETOWN, PEI
Rural residents have good access to universities and enjoy the same success rates as their urban counterparts, a study released today, June 25, 2008, by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) has found.

The study, Outcomes of Rural and Urban Maritime University Graduates, indicates the number and distribution of university campuses in the Maritimes appear to support access to universities by the region's rural youth. And, while rural graduates tend to borrow more to finance their education, they are equally successful in making the transition to the work world and further study as their urban peers.

Survey results are accurate within plus or minus 1.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

"Our main goal in this study was to determine whether urban and rural graduates are equally successful in their transitions to further study and the work world, and we have found that indeed they are," said Mireille Duguay, CEO of the commission.

Ms. Duguay noted that, among first-degree holders, the employment rate two years after graduation was 95 per cent, and average annual earnings were $34,853.

"We also found that graduates of urban and rural origins were represented among the Class of 2003 in numbers proportionate to the general population -- this suggests that our rural and urban youth have equal access to universities in the region."

Report findings indicate that graduates from rural areas (69 per cent) were significantly more likely to have borrowed than their urban counterparts (59 per cent), and were particularly more likely than urban graduates to have borrowed from government sources (58 per cent vs. 44 per cent).

On average, rural graduates borrowed a total of $25,652 for their 2003 program, nearly $5,000 or 24 per cent more, than those from urban areas.

Ms. Duguay said one of the likely reasons for the trend is that more rural students incur higher expenses as they move away from home to pursue their education. Rural graduates are also more likely to come from families with lower socio-economic status, which increases the likelihood that they meet eligibility requirements for government student loan programs, and are eligible to borrow greater amounts of money.

The survey was conducted through a partnership between New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, and depended upon the co-operation of the region's universities.

Market Quest, a third-party market-research firm, conducted the survey and E. Dianne Looker prepared the full report. This fall, MPHEC plans to conduct a second survey with the class of 2003.

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission was established in 1974 to assist institutions and governments to enhance the post-secondary learning environment. The commission's 19 members are from the Maritime provinces and represent higher education institutions, provincial governments and the general public.

HIGHLIGHTS Maritime universities appear to be equally accessible to youth from rural and urban communities.

Within the Class of 2003, graduates from both rural and urban origins are present in numbers representative of the general population. This suggests that access by rural youth to universities in the region may not be the issue it appears to be elsewhere in Canada, with access improved by the number and geographical distribution of campuses in the region.

Urban graduates are more likely than rural to have parents who have attained a university degree.

There is a difference in the educational attainment level of urban and rural populations, with urban populations tending to be more highly educated than rural. This trend in the general population is likely an important factor explaining the finding that urban graduates are more likely than rural to have parents who have attained a university degree.

Rural or urban origin does not have an important impact upon the likelihood of returning for further study, the nature of the transition to the work world, or graduate mobility.

There is a small difference between urban and rural graduates in their choice of academic program, with urban graduates slightly more likely to have chosen liberal arts & sciences programs rather than applied/professional programs. Once this variable (well known as a predictor of outcomes) is taken into account, differences initially observed in graduates' transitions to further study and employment based on community type (i.e., rural vs. urban) disappeared - there were no significant differences between the two groups in employment rates, type of position (permanent, contract, temporary or casual) or wages. Finally, the post-graduation mobility patterns of urban and rural graduates were not significantly different.

Graduates from rural communities are more likely than urban to borrow, and borrow more to finance their degree.

With equal success in outcomes in terms of employment and likelihood of pursuing further education documented here, it would appear the only substantial difference in outcomes between graduates of rural and urban origins is that rural graduates are more likely to borrow and to borrow more on average. This may be partly explained by rural graduates being more likely to incur the greater costs associated with having to move away from home. In addition, more rural graduates would be eligible for student financial assistance because of the distribution by parental educational attainment (more rural graduates of lower socioeconomic status).

http://www2.mphec.ca/english/pdfs/TrendsSurveyingUpdten.pdf

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